

NEW BOOKS.

Brief Reviews of Important and Interesting New Publications.

In "Poems," by Dr. Edward A. Tilton, Jr. (Climax Street Publishing Company, Cincinnati), we find it said in the beginning of the opening poem:

There lived the power that nestled in my bones
The love of thee, Poet, the true and subtle.

Leaving aside the question of sublimity, is it the fact that poetry deserves the compliment of being called true? When it is considered what a variety of opinion there is as to what constitutes the fact and expression of truth, and when it is further considered how much the necessities of rhyme and metre have absorbed the attention of the poet, finally to the distraction of him from the pursuit of truth merely, there seems to be some reason to suspect that truth, so far as poetry is concerned, is still at the bottom of a well.

"All-withering time," the concluding expression of Dr. Blount's opening verse, not only rhymes perfectly with the concluding expression of the second line, but it suggests and indicates what happens to a great deal of poetry. If poetry were inevitably truth, there is reason to suppose that all-withering time (that is, inaccuracy) would be without effect upon it. As a matter of common observation, a great deal of poetry succumbs to all-withering time, which seems indeed to take an especial delight in exercising itself upon the poets. Dr. Blount's prayer is that all-withering time will spare poetry, on account of its sublimity and truth, will forbear to destroy it with its all-withering time, and will permit it to grow greener and blossomer and flourish for evermore; but nothing is plainer than that all-withering time is bound inexorably by its duties, and that in spite of prayers and protestations it will go on withering. In his poem, "The Love I Bring Is Earthly," Dr. Blount places himself in opposition to that form of love which aims to be consistent with absolute reason and a deliberate pulse:

Love Platonist? No, by Heaven! Plato could not love at all!
God might, but poor mortals cannot, and I would not if I could.

Burn the lambent flames cordally 'neath the sparkling breathers' call?
Give it sex-love, the phlogiston. How it sparkles through the wood.

Here is a holding up of the hands of Byron, Heine, and Mrs. Eliza Wheeler Wilcox. Whether one approves of such need and reasoning or not, there is no doubt that there is plenty of it in the world, and it may be that it is the province of the poet to countenance and encourage nature. It may be remarked in passing that the phrase, "How it sparkles through the wood," seems to be a phrase of rhyme rather than by reason of any appropriateness that attaches to it otherwise. Certain professional opportunities and experiences reflect themselves in Dr. Blount's poetry:

I saw a man's frozen form
Upon a college class one day;
With features that in wild alarm
And tortured shape and lifted arm
And warding death away.

This is not pleasant, and the reflection of the poet at the conclusion of the stanza, "How grim is death," is founded in obvious reason. This unpleasant experience affords contrasts, as the poem goes on to show:

But when I looked at Mildred Lee
Upon that dripping plank to-day,
It was so pitiful to see
Those staring eyes that looked at me
In such a mournful way:

'Twas so unfair she could not live,
The pretty girl who had to give
So much that really did give
For what might be beyond the mist,
That weeping I bowed to say,
'How sad is death.'

It is a relief to turn even to such a poem as the one entitled, "The Cupid of the East," which is a means of an encouraging or cheerful piece of verse when considered absolutely:

It was a day, yes, a black, black day,
From the lips of a friend it fell,
And it stunned me so that I could not speak,
Far, rather by far, had it been the shriek
Of the vilest fiend of hell.

This is, as it were, and as it is, a funeral in its color as a war caption in a yellow journal, was chargeable to a fair girl who married another. Black as it was, it was susceptible to the ameliorating influence of time:

Both have forgotten that black, black day
That shattered and pained me;
My friend—he is happy and his wife,
My love has gone back to her love-legging life,
And I—oh, forever I go,
And look with a smile, incredulous smile,
And say, "Oh, ye world, I am dead to your wile;
In vain ye may tempt with beauty and wit,
The hollowest moment, I learned it of old,
And I know 'tis a horrible life."

It is well for a poet to be able to call up a cynic smile in the circumstances, and it is to be hoped that the unworthy elation of the faithless girl, if she felt any, was chilled and suppressed when she learned the truth. Presumably she was not "Edith," of whom Dr. Blount speaks with an entire absence of bitterness:

I am jealous, pleasure-mingling,
For to-day I came to pass
I discovered Edith kissing
Her sweet tongue in the glass—
Surely this
Waste of kisses,
Merely kissing in the glass.

As to the final allegation, it may be that Edith was practicing and taking reasonable and harmless means to make herself an expert. A poet should be careful of the construction of his poetry, to the end that he may secure the quality of truth as well as the quality of sublimity. In the poem called "Brothers," Dr. Blount compares some untutored musician, some "Blind Tom" of his acquaintance, to an artist of current eminence:

I heard Yagze, the great musician, play,
A city's wealth and talent at hand,
And as the teeming throng died away,
They rose and hailed him prince of dulcet sound.
From floor to roof there yelled a vast chorus:
Along the lofty tiers the plaudits ran;
And had a flaming angel stood before them,
They scarce had heeded less that wondrous man.

They and Dr. Blount felt very much the same rush and intensity of impressions that have been recorded by a distinguished poet who once listened to Paderewski. Rhythms multiply at the bidding of enthusiasm:

The notes he flung in music ring,
Like angels' hymns, his silver tongue,
Above the throng:
Now low, now high, they float and die
And shriek and sigh
And roll along.

A demon's yell, a witch's spell,
A murder yell, the pangs of hell,
The wailing accents cold:
A lover's song, a passion strain,
A parting lull, a maiden's wrong,
In sweeping numbers all together rolled.

That the notes should be and subsequently shriek illustrations of the power and privilege of music, but Yagze, in the language of the top gallery, is not the whole shooting match:

I heard Old Ben, the black musician, play
Beneath the branches of a mighty tree;
A motley audience, grouped around him, lay,
Or lounged or slouched in the twilight glee;
For all the laborers of the country side,
And all the maidens of the village near,
Had come to listen through the Sunday tide,
With rapt attention and a tear.

Anybody who thinks that high musical effects are confined to the Metropolitan Opera House is very much mistaken. Down in the cornfield, also, they know how to produce competent sounds:

He knew by rote no measured note,
Saw such a foot from woodland throat,
Untrammelled glee:
When but a child, and undisciplined,
A spirit wild came and beguiled
His nature free.

Streamlets flowing, cattle lowing,
Horns blowing, melons growing—
So sang his vibrant voice,
Happy hours, sunny showers,
Fragrant flowers, bending bowers,
In streams of broad, unending rhythm flow.

The parallel hardly needs to be pointed, but there is no reason why a poet especially should be called upon to renounce his opportunity. Years in the opera house and Old Ben, in the cornfield, were playing the same soul in the fiddle of both of them:

And if I think that on that final day,
When God shall call his music home again,
When all material things shall pass away,
And sought for harmony on earth remain:
That amidst the keening of his melody,
Although on earth a mighty space divide,
Like brothers there the mighty hosts shall see
Old Ben and great Yagze stand side by side.

Belle R. Harrison is also the author of "Poems," (G. W. Dillingham Company). These in large part and with an admirable naturalness and fluency draw more reason, which it is always well to present to the attention of a careless and forgetful world. In the choice, that is before us, as independent and discretionary beings, should we do right, or should we do wrong? This is a question which Mrs. Harrison answers plainly and with those attractions of form and style which bestow distinction upon the poet's art:

Let us stand for the right, whatever betide,
Though friends may forsake us and foes may deride,
Let us put on the armor and fight the good fight,
Blest in the struggle for right over might.

There can be no question as to the reasonableness in morals of this view; and it is probable that the poet's own sense of duty would lead him to the same conclusion. The poet's art, the poet's art, is treated in exactly the proper manner by Mrs. Harrison, who understands perfectly at what juncture it is better to laugh than to scold:

She laughs, the dimples come and go,
She laughs, like rippling waters' flow,
She laughs, but not at me; oh, no!
She smiles, the world is bright and fair,
She smiles, my heart is light as air,
She smiles on me—do I despair?

She loves, ah, would you like to know?
She loves, she loves, she loves, she loves,
She loves—she loves her head-long Joe!

She weds, Joe's heart and mine beat fast,
She weds, we really are agast,
She weds Old Moneybags at last!

Many of Mrs. Harrison's poems are descriptive, and a number of them are in dialect. Versification seems to be with her a natural gift. What is here presented is unostentatiously and happily achieved, and makes agreeable reading.

From time to time we receive things from Dr. Paul Carus and the Open Court Publishing Company of Chicago. They are always interesting things, and as a rule they are good to look upon—sometimes printed on soft paper and illustrated by artistic gentlemen of Japan or India. The last arrival is a queer little book, "The Book of the Dead," bearing biographies that recall the plain, every-day Chinese laundry bill, and are here translated as "Lao-Tse's Tao-Te-King." Chinese-English, with introduction, translation, and notes, by Dr. Paul Carus. This is an English version of the "Book on Reason and Virtue" of the old philosopher who lived in China in the ninth century B. C. and is said to have been the founder of Taoism. From the portrait that faces the title page we should judge him to have been a pleasant old person. He is seated on a bed, and such of his features as are not obscured by his prominent nose and whiskers are lit up with a happy smile. In fact, our only possible objection to him would be based on the ground that his liveliness in the matter of titles is apt to lead his reader to some confusion. Thus we learn from Dr. Carus that his family name, Li, means Plum-tree. His proper name, Li, means Plum-tree. His proper name, Li, means Plum-tree, while his appellation was Po-Yang, which is "Count of the Positive Principle," representing manliness, the sun, and the South. Moreover, his posthumous title was Tao, which means that he had long loved to his ears, and long loved to be a sign of virtue. The philosopher, however, called himself Lao-Tse, the old philosopher, though he was sometimes known as Lao-Chün, the ancient sage, master, or Prince, or Lao-Chü, the old child, or "he who even as an old man remains childlike." Lastly, his followers, the Taoists, speak of him as Tai shang Lao Chün, the greatly eminent, ancient master, or merely as Tai shang, the greatly eminent one.

The ideal of non-action as the basis of ethics and the Taoist virtue of tranquillity, quietude, or rest commend themselves to all thoughtful and not too energetic persons, and there is much sound wisdom to be found in these extracts from the writings of the old Celestial. There is, of course, something extremely Chinese about the ancient philosopher that leads him to express himself in an entirely Chinese way, as we see from the translation of the original text provided by Dr. Carus. Thus in a characteristic discourse on the virtue of dignity the philosopher says: "The heavy is the light the root, and rest is the master of motion, therefore the holy man in his daily walk departs not from the baggage wagon. Though he have magnificent sights, he calmly sits in an unconcerned manner. Every one must admit that there is a hint of eternal truth in the following: 'One who knows does not talk. One who talks does not know. Therefore the sage shuts his mouth and keeps his sense gates closed.' With the exception of the imperfect version that appears in 'The Sacred Books of the East,' the present translation, we may imagine, the only English version now in print.

Now that all eyes are turned toward the sea, we are pleased to be able to signal the arrival of a poet who is undoubtedly on time in the volume neatly bound in blue and silver, wherein Mr. William S. Bate of Brooklyn publishes an introductory paraphrase of the poet's lines:

I do not ask that I may stand
Among the rulers of the land,
Or that from off the battlefield
I may be borne on victor's shield.

Let others make the people's laws,
And win with sword their glad applause;
But would that I might make the songs
To breathe their joys and woes their wrongs.

It is well in the days of war that there should be poets who would leave the gentler part, as a poet, to let others get the glory. In "Abhor, Thar, Landman!" Mr. Bate, addressing an imaginary vandal, makes a poetic plea for the Hartford:

Ah, thar, landman! Spare that ship!
Touch not a single gun!
For the sailors' eyes my mind
My reason's eyes my mind
My reason's eyes my mind

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